

Task Force D Meeting Summary

Friday, November 4, 2005

Participants: Justin Rashid – American Spoon Foods, Inc. (Chair), Tom Bloomer – Burr Oaks Farm, Bill Bobier – Full Circle Farm, Patty Cantrell – MI Land Use Institute, Marty Gerencer – Michigan Food and Farming Systems, Rich Harlow – MI Department of Agriculture, Christine Lietzau – MI Department of Agriculture, Terri Novak – MI Department of Environmental Quality, Chris Peterson – MSU Agriculture Product Center, Melinda Remer – Travel Michigan, Robin Rosenbaum – MI Department of Agriculture, Gordon Wenk – MI Department of Agriculture, and Wayne Wood – Michigan Farm Bureau.

Additional Participants: Chris Bedford – Sweetwater Local Foods Market, Bob Craig – MI Department of Agriculture, Kathy Fedder – MI Department of Agriculture, Jeanne Lipe – MI Department of Agriculture.

The second Task Force D: Enhancing Agricultural Viability meeting convened Friday, November 5, 2005 from 12:00 – 3:00 pm at the Michigan Farm Bureau in Lansing. Council Member Justin Rashid chaired the meeting. Task Force participant Chris Peterson facilitated the meeting.

Mr. Rashid called the meeting to order and introduced Chris Bedford, co-manager of Sweetwater Local Foods Market in Muskegon, MI for a brief presentation. The Sweetwater Local Foods Market is the first farmers' market in Michigan to "exclusively sell humanely raised animal products and chemical free/Certified Organic fruits and vegetables." The Market's slogan is, "Healthy, Humane, Homegrown – Local Food You Can Trust." Mr. Bedford finished his presentation with a list of four specific recommendations to the Task Force:

- 1) Aggregate grants for many small farmers into one larger pot of money that can be administered by a group who can provide technical support for farmers looking to get into the grant/loan process.
- 2) Aggregate grants around specific market opportunities (e.g., farm-to-school programs, direct marketing opportunities, value-added food businesses.)
- 3) Develop programs to grow urban gardens linked with local food systems (e.g., use IDA mechanisms and other funding to develop urban gardens linked to farmers' markets, incorporate food security into urban planning, develop affordable remediation tactics for smaller brownfield sites.)
- 4) Develop a state-certified farmers market (i.e., certify Michigan growers to sell in farmers' markets.)

Task Force participants briefly discussed the issues Mr. Bedford raised and agreed to consider the recommendations in future discussions.

Mr. Peterson facilitated the review and discussion of the "Task Force D: Responses to Facilitation Questions" that was generated between the September meeting and this meeting. The questions were posed via e-mail to the Task Force (TF) participants, and responses were compiled. The questions (Q1, Q2, Q3) and abridged responses are listed here:

Q1) What do you believe are the five most important external factors (social, economic and/or political) that will affect agricultural viability in the state over the next 3-5 years?

- a. High land values
- b. Foreign market expansion/lower cost imports
- c. Degradation of physical infrastructure that supports agriculture
- d. Need for diversity in state economy
- e. Loss of an experienced/educated agricultural workforce and succession of younger generation
- f. Cost of energy
- g. Fragmentation of farmland
- h. New technologies
- i. Water availability
- j. Climate/access to markets
- k. World trade considerations
- l. Lack of profitability

Q2) What policies, programs or collaborations are in place now that enhance the state's agricultural viability?

- a. Value-added ventures
- b. Farmland preservation/Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs
- c. MSU's Agriculture and Natural Resource Product Center
- d. Agriculture Processing Renaissance Zones
- e. Right-to-farm protections
- f. Public Act 116
- g. Multicultural farmer outreach
- h. Michigan Organics Advisory Committee
- i. Commodity groups
- j. Farm organizations
- k. Select Michigan program
- l. Migrant Labor Housing Program
- m. Right to process
- n. Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program
- o. Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
- p. Emergence of locally based food business incubators (Oceana and Huron Counties) and multiple community food system organizations (SE and Northern MI)
- q. "Biobased Economy" study in which MDA is participating

Q3) What are the missing policy/program elements or what additional opportunities exist for the state to enhance agricultural viability?

- a. Fully funding/implementing PDR programs
- b. Education on new technologies and market opportunities
- c. Outreach to minority farming communities
- d. Promotion of Michigan agriculture
- e. Regional and state wide coordination and planning
- f. Establish water use management
- g. Fund state organic program
- h. Food safety improvements
- i. More favorable business climate
- j. State investment in rail transport
- k. Economic incentives for pollution prevention on farms
- l. Fully functional and fully funded support network for innovation and entrepreneurship in agriculture
- m. Development of an Innovation Fund to support farm viability

The Task Force participants largely focused on discussing Q1 and decided to add the following as important external factors that were not represented in the original responses:

- Federal and state food and farm policy
- Regulatory burden
- Tax policy
- World monetary policy
- Consumer retail education
- Health concerns/crises
- Farmer education

Next, Task Force participants consolidated responses to Q1 into a brief list of primary and background factors influencing agricultural viability in Michigan. Participants decided that agricultural viability could be improved if they enhance opportunities and minimize challenges in the following factor areas:

Primary Factors

- 1) Markets and market development
 - Market high benefits and higher quality of local products
 - Find new consumers
 - Market what consumers want
- 2) Infrastructure
 - Local distribution networks
 - Transportation/rail maintenance and improvement
 - Processing facilities
 - Farm direct opportunities
- 3) Land
 - Development rights
 - Conservation

- Taxation
 - Reduce fragmentation and parcelization
 - Urban utilization of land
 - Sprawl
 - Zoning
- 4) People
- “New” farmers on the land (youth, migrants, unconventional)
 - Stable source of skilled labor
 - Regulation
 - Managerial and marketing expertise

Background Factors

- 1) Technology
- 2) Energy policy
- 3) Globalization

Then the Task Force participants moved on to look at Q2 and whether the policies, programs and collaborations now in place meet the challenges the above-mentioned Factors pose. Responses to Q2 matched up to the Factors identified by the group, however, the participants agreed that the programs and resources listed in Q2 are not enough to increase agricultural viability in the state. Participants also noted that there is a lack of policy/program development in:

- Programmatic connections between food, agriculture and health
- Programs to get new farmers onto farms and facilitate intergenerational transfer

The focus in subsequent meetings will be to follow up on the policy and program opportunities (responses to Q3), and developing specific recommendations pertaining to those opportunities that address the identified Factors influencing agricultural viability (the consolidated list from Q1). At the next meeting, the participants will focus on developing recommendations relating to the primary factors of “Markets and market development” and “People.”

Chris Peterson from MSU’s Product Center will facilitate the January Task Force D meeting, which is **Friday, January 20, 2006 from 1:00pm – 3:30pm** at MI Department of Agriculture’s Geagley Lab, Gordon Guyer Room, 1615 Harrison Rd, East Lansing.